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To Wonder, Wander, and Linger in the World of Standardized Testing

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The standards movement began as a nobly-intended effort to establish a core curriculum—a template of knowledge and skills that would guide teaching and learning across the K-12 curriculum. Our attempts to standardize curriculum may have unintended and deleterious side-effect: The atrophying of the mind's natural tendencies for exploratory play and inherently imaginative dimensions. This paper engages us in a critical remembering of our pedagogical relationships with children. It reminds us of children's ways of being and asks how we might engage them in a rigorous appreciation of curricular literacies without thwarting their wonderful wanderings. Ultimately, we worry about the place of standardized testing in this picture which circulates and perpetuates prevailing risk management discourses and colonizes pedagogical relations.

Keywords

testing, curriculum, standardized tests, high stakes tests

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Abstract

The standards movement began as a nobly-intended effort to establish a core curriculum—a template of knowledge and skills that would guide teaching and learning across the K-12 curriculum. Our attempts to standardize curriculum may have unintended and deleterious side-effect: The atrophying of the mind’s natural tendencies for exploratory play and inherently imaginative dimensions. This paper engages us in a critical remembering of our pedagogical relationships with children. It reminds us of children’s ways of being and asks how we might engage them in a rigorous appreciation of curricular literacies without thwarting their wonderful wanderings. Ultimately, we worry about the place of standardized testing in this picture which circulates and perpetuates prevailing risk management discourses and colonizes pedagogical relations.

Introduction: A Father’s Narrative/Children’s Ways of Being

For me (Randall), running has always been a particularly focused activity. Running the course has instrumental value; it is a mode of escape from the pressures of everyday life, discipline, a way to keep fit, and even a moral stance (running is good, not running is bad). On the long runs, the “fifteen milers,” I learn to ignore the pain, and eventually, the scenery, becoming a detached consciousness against a dissolving landscape—so I find walking with my family frustrating. My son Kevin, who is four, wants to “explore.” He runs ahead, races with my daughter (who is seven), only to loop to where we’ve been before, to find a peculiar stick, which becomes a cane, and then a wand, which leads him to a path in the woods, to the forest transformed into a place of mystery, awe, imaginings. “Why can’t we just walk?” I demand, caught as I am within anxious sentiments of purpose and discipline. Later, that night my son tells me that the “sky is full of firebirds,” and Kevin demands my presence in the back yard “to see.” He’s right, the sky is full of greyspecked birds that float like cinders on the September wind. I begin to understand that for him, now and here, there are no similes. The sky is on fire.

And so as writers we find ourselves using this landscape as our metaphor. The paths in the woods against the dissolving backdrops of forest scenery are the places where “running the course” (the etymological meaning of curriculum), and the child’s imaginative wanderings diverge, as Robert Frost might put it. On the one hand, we see the runner bent on reaching his goal (perhaps even with a stop watch in hand as he strives to better his time and head for the competition). On the other, we see the child immersed in his places of mystery where the stick is a sword and the child’s absorbing consciousness unifies the elements of the environment within the identity of the self.

Running and walking call out for our attention to the lives of children in contrast to the lives of adults. Kevin's world that he might run or walk through, is a magically enchanted place. Being with him we gain a faint glimpse into his way of knowing the world. Out of empathy perhaps, we feel homesick for the lives of our children, knowing that they have left the world where they wondered, wandered and lingered, for ours where we cannot find room for them at this historical juncture: We are experiencing the inexorable and "seductive hold of the scientific, technological ethos that enframes education, and thereby our understanding of teaching" (Aoki, 1992, p.17). Limited by this ethos, all children are all left behind.

This technological ethos is manifested-but not exclusively-in the circulation of discourses that find as their node the No Child Left Behind legislation signed by President Bush in 2001. This legislation, circulating with other dominant discourses, has imprinted schooling with standardized tests, (the normative gaze statistically materialized), flattened the pedagogic landscape, and turned it into an unfertile ground stripped of ambiguity, childhood meaning, imagination, complexity. In this content-driven landscape the joy of being together with children slips away with the running of the course, the conspicuous consumption of objectives, prescribed curricula and the regurgitation of fragmented remnants of knowledge on standardized tests. Ultimately, these children are bound in their innocence to us and so it is that we realize that the relationship between the adult curriculum designer and the young child is inextricably united as an ethical project as we consider how we will live together pedagogically.

The purpose of this paper is to critically re-collect, and hence recover other meanings of education lost in the current educational conversation. In this way we hope to broaden the horizons of educational possibility which have become unduly narrowed by the current discourse. We introduce metaphors such as lingering, wondering and wandering to remind us of the inner world of the child and ways of being together pedagogically with children. We are very concerned because the current discourse says to teachers and administrators that we do not "need anything from children in the pedagogical relationship but their devotion, diligence and cooperation" (Brown, 1992, p.61). And so, we re-collect our thoughts on the aesthetic dimension of teaching and call attention to the inner world of the child to resist the pervasive technical discourse that has colonized education. For us, our pedagogical union with children is not a technical problem to be solved by more testing, but an ethical concern and hence it must be carefully considered as we proceed into the educational terrain of the 21st century.

The Ghost in the Machine—Risk Discourses and the Culture of Assessment

On the surface it is difficult to argue with the rhetoric of No Child Left Behind, since after all, we all want the very best for our children. Still, we would be wise not to slip effortlessly into descriptions of meaningful assessments without treating the omnipresent outcomes of NCLB-standardized testing that entrench a school culture of assessment—with some suspicion. We begin by asking how it is that this legislation, which has its origins in part at least in the inclusive civil rights movement of

and ESEA in the 1960's, becomes a discourse that prescribes or limits the horizons of possibility of American education. We respond in part to this line of inquiry by agreeing with Foucault's genealogical premise that the multifarious origins of a policy document such as NCLB and its applications are often worlds apart. In other words, history cannot be reduced to a neat, teleological "trajectory of emergence" (Scheurich & McKenzie, 2005, p.847) that begins in a definitive past and continues uninterrupted, into the present and future under the guidance of a rational subject ...who has 'his' hand on the guiding wheel of history. Instead history is created by a complex array of processes, dispersions, procedures, accidents, hatreds, policies, desires, dominations, unintended or uncontrolled circulations of techniques of power, commercial practices, mores, analyses of labor and bourgeois morality, the endlessly repeated play of dominations, literature, political decisions, discontinuities, opinions expressed in daily life, the fanatical and unending discussions of scholars, randomness, dissensions, petty malice, precise scientific methods, subjected bodies, and faulty calculations, to name but just a few-and man, the subject, in snot running this show called history (Scheurich & McKenzie, 2005, p.858).

Understanding the past as emerging rather than originating reveals the ideological nature of the NCLB which would have us return to an idealized, glorious past, where difference was persecuted or ignored.

Like Foucault, we understand the history of educational thought and practice archeologically—as the outcome of a series of discourses that circulate, combine, transmute, underscore and resist other discourses—to generate practices in often unimaginable ways. Discourses are institutionally constructed representational frameworks that stand:

"...for objects, events, processes, and states of affairs in the world. These frameworks provide the basis for shared understanding, including an understanding of what knowledge is required to enhance, modify, or deny the representation." (Ericson & Haggerty, 1997, p. 83)

The current culture of assessment combines with and disseminates discourses that undergird the bureaucratic principles of administrative authority, predictability, order, instrumental rationality, surveillance and normalization. This culture eschews principles (and activities) where novelty, ambiguity, creativity, uncertainty and flux appear. Broadly speaking, NCLB in its "eventual uses" contributes to, and circulates a risk management discourse in the pedagogical realm. Briefly, risk discourses ferret out or identify dangers and risks and seek bureaucratic or technological solutions to their management and elimination. Risk discourses are omnipresent, and have become entrenched politically (especially at this time in the United States), as a modern "discourse of governance ... materialized in forms of bureaucracy and surveillance" (Ericson & Haggerty, 1997, p. 83). Notably, risk communication as a governmental discourse is not only suffocating the public sphere in the United States but Europe as well. It has become the "foundational concept around which ... a new notion of a European community is being constructed" (Visvanathan, 2004, p.2). (Sadly, with the

recent terrorist bombings in London, risk discourses will centrifugally consolidate and delimit the meanings/and representations of the “European Economic Community”).

Risk management discourses, promoted and circulated by insurance companies, banks, police, private security companies-and schools-are institutional prescriptions that define dangers and devise “... technologies of inscription to deal with those dangers” (Ericson & Haggerty, 1997, p. 85). Risk discourse appear as a “negative logic” that produces a “relentless reflexivity with respect to the irregularities, the dark side of life, the unknowable, and chaos. Risks become ‘objectified negative images of utopias’” (partial quote from Heidegger, 1974, in Ericson & Haggerty, 1997, p. 85-6).

These discourses are heavily tainted with notions of deficit; they focus on scapegoats and “deficiencies, cracks and faults in what exists” (Ericson & Haggerty, 1997, p. 86). Given all these “dangers” people are forced “to accept expert knowledge of risk-a knowledge that creates new insecurities-as the only viable solution” (Ericson & Haggerty, 1997, p. 86). This results in a society suffocating from the loss of the creative and utopian spirit because risk society institutions become particularly

...negative and defensive. Basically, one is no longer concerned with obtaining something ‘good,’ but rather with preventing the worst” through risk management technologies that “help manage fear and anxiety (Ericson & Haggerty, 1997, p. 86).

Risk management institutions are deeply pragmatic, always scanning for technical solutions to problem that incapacitate action. They eschew causality in favor of laws of regularity that establish standards of objective fact and the basis of objective knowledge. They turn life into the thing Max Weber believed it to be: ‘deliberate, systematic, calculable, impersonal, instrumental, exact, quantitative, rule-governed, predictable, methodical, purposeful, sober, scrupulous, efficacious, intelligible and consistent’” (Ericson & Haggerty, 1997, p. 87).

Prophetically, David Jardine (1992) foretold the effects of the technological ethos on schooling, and how it perpetuates a pervasive fear of being left behind and more technological intervention:

The increasing specialization of technical knowledge seems to bring with it the perception that one does not really understand the world, oneself, or others with such knowledge. One could witness how, for example, the relentless proliferation of research data on every conceivable feature of the child’s life seems to engender the feeling of knowing less and less, of being more and more unable in the face of such proliferation, so that the only way to survive is to diligently attempt to ‘get on top of things’ and try to ‘pin them down.’ Because an overwhelming technical knowledge or every conceivable phenomenon is possible, this possibility begins to harbour the perception that one is increasingly out of control if one does not pursue this possibility... . And this perception of being out of control with technical knowledge, of being “left behind,” leads precisely to the anxiety that drives us to relentlessly pursue it, since it is precisely technical knowledge that offers us the promise

of relative control. Minuscule obedience to the letter of the law seems to ensure salvation, dividing and subdividing human life into the smallest possible manipulable and controllable bits (p. 121-122). Risk discourses re-present a world that abhors ambiguity. Diversity (in form of intelligences, race, class, culture, gender), are aberrations to be “pinned down and solved.” Solutions to the problems of difference in risk discourse are determined by laws of regularity that establish standards of objective fact which serve as the basis of objective knowledge. The standards movement can be traced to a number of commissions sparked by events that generated and perpetuated risk discourses. Typical was the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (1983) that recognized the failure of the United States to educate its citizens at home, and by extension, to compete in an emerging global marketplace which put American dominance through competition for global markets at risk. (This is how we understand the competitive concern for running the course/not being left behind.) The standards monopoly on the dissemination and evaluation of knowledge can be traced to the “excellence movement” that emerged as a result of this and other reports in the 1980’s. The excellence movement, most evident in 1983-86, (deMarrais, LeCompte, 81), adopted a neo-essentialist perspective on schooling, suggesting that the solution to failing schools was a back-to-basics curriculum, taught in a classrooms that emphasized intellectual and moral discipline, certainty, regularity and uniformity (a return to earlier, glorious origins). Student progress was to be evaluated through standardized achievement tests, performance-based competency testing and mastery learning (Ornstein & Levine, 2003).

As we have already noted, risk discourses produce scapegoats and force communities to accept expert definitions of risk. Generally, the mass media has contributed to a climate of fear as it has sought out and reported new sources of terror and risk to persons, the environment and the state in what appears more and more a voyeuristic and fantasized Orwellian “mean world”—where no one is safe (Adler & Rodman, 2000). Locally and more specifically, teachers and schools are constructed as high risk places requiring relentless reflexivity with respect to irregularities (particularly after such highly publicized tragedies such as Columbine). The media is particularly good at constructing and disseminating risk discourses. In a world where it is politically incorrect to target minorities, women, and clearly identified Others, teachers (professors, and criminals) represent the enemies within the state (how else can we understand the claim that the NEA is a terrorist organization?). Schooling is at the center of media-generated moral panics with teachers as the target. Cohen describes how societies appear to be

...subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media... Sometimes the panic passes over and is forgotten, except in folk-lore and collective memory; at other times it has more serious and long-lasting repercussions and might produce such changes as those in legal and social policy or even in the way society perceives itself (Cohen (1972), quoted by Watney, p. 126).

Moral panics focus on fear, dramatize anxiety, and provide “a main source of information about the normative contours of a society ... about the boundaries beyond which one should not venture and about the shapes the devil can assume” (p. 126). Media-generated images of schooling perpetuate anxieties that underscore a need for order, predictability, accountability, and essentialism—a back to basics approach to curriculum and the world at large. Again, let’s not forget that the contemporary culture of assessment serves capitalist systems where predictability, accountability and managing risk (this is our pedagogical language!) reduces risk in economies where profit is the primary goal (Giddens, 1999). Risk discourses are produced and circulated by insurance companies, banks, credit card and utility companies, automobile and home furnishing stores that build risk profiles.

Within the educational system the standards movement and the management of risk resonate with bureaucratic-administrative ideologies of control that have seriously encroached upon the pedagogical landscape. The social-efficiency schooling model, its nascent form articulated by Frederic Taylor in his scientific management of a Bethlehem steel mill and perpetuated in graduate school administration programs, plays handsomely into this approach (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999). The scientific management of schools privileges order, discipline, predictability and “training.” These characteristics were valued by industrialists who sought to discipline as yet unassimilated, immigrant populations at the turn of the 19c, (populations not used to factory discipline) and who saw little difference between running efficient factories and running efficient schools (deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999). Factories and schools require docile bodies, as Foucault noted in *Discipline and Punishment* (1977/1995).

The collective sense that America was “investing in its schools” appears natural to the corporate American culture, and is grounded in the realities of the high costs of education. In the 1980’s “the combined state and federal funding accounted for more than half the total dollars in most school districts” which “hastened a shift from traditional forms of authority that had evolved under strong personalities in particular localities to more bureaucratic, legal-rational forms of control” (Grant, 1988, p. 128). In other words, the corporate schooling model privileged the management functions of administrators and eroded the epistemic authority of teachers.

Social-efficiency models of schooling are society-centered and future oriented, positioning children (and creating identities for them as young adults) as objects of the “pedagogical enterprise” whose identities are flattened: The dossier precedes the child into the classroom, so that children no longer are ciphers with the potential however slight, to negotiate their own identities. As Skourtes (2000) notes, the social category of youth-at-risk “has been in use since the 1960’s in social science literature, in schools, intervention programs, and in society in general to describe youth who possess specific characteristics that are viewed by certain dominant members of society as putting them at risk for future failure.” (p. 2). She notes how this discourse is based on “‘probability’ that a youth will display problems later in life ... the process is intended to predict behavior before [our emphasis] it begins.... Youth who are described as ‘at risk’ are viewed as statistically more like to come to the fate of an unproductive adult life or future failure” (p. 4).

In this educational version of Minority Report (where criminals were arrested before they commit their crime), the current deficit model of children is a social construction which proposes a “transcendent and absolute” category that reifies youth by placing them in the center of risk, a process that further justifies intense “examination” of their lives: “If the children who have been labelled and watched eventually behave in the manner predicted, evidence is garnered in support of the risk factors predictive qualities” (p.6). Of course, this is a normalizing gaze because what “gets defined as normal is culturally specific” (p.7). Risk discourses are future-orientated. The center of risk consciousness lies not in the present, but in the future [emphasis in original]. In risk society, the past loses the power to determine the present. Its place is taken by the future that is something non-existent, invented, fictive, as the cause of the current experience and action” (Beck, 1992, quoted in Ericson & Haggerty, 1997, p. 86).

Ultimately the kids-at-risk discourse entwines with “governmental concern ... regarding the need for a well trained, competitive workforce” (Skourtes, 2000, p. 8), and thus meeting the needs of corporate America. Interestingly, and not really an aside to this, are the “actuarial” techniques of risk assessment that pervade the criminal justice system at this time, where there is no longer the liberal, moral indignation associated with the criminal’s behaviour, but the impassionate calculation of his crime and risks to re-offend. (Rigokas, 1999). In other words, prisons are well prepared to accept the dossiers identifying the kids at-risk from schools that have already completed the classificatory procedures so that the seamless continuity of population management begins with early intervention and ends in incarceration. It should be noted that these economically disenfranchised, incarcerated populations also lose their right to vote for life in many states—thus ensuring the predictability and continuity of the social order narrowly defined by corporate America.

As these risk discourses circulate and coincide, the “dark side” of schooling is ferreted out, as teachers and students become objects of surveillance, normalization and discipline. The ubiquitous examination has become the technique to minimize risk and assuage fears of uncertain futures and entrench administrative authority—combining the techniques of an observing hierarchy with those of a normalizing judgment. This normalizing gaze embedded in the examination, makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish, to make the dark side of pedagogical life visible so as to differentiate and judge (failing schools, kids at risk, qualified teachers).

That is why, in all the mechanisms of discipline, the examination is highly ritualized. In it are combined the ceremony of power and the form of the experiment, the deployment and the establishment of truth. At the heart of the procedures of discipline, it manifests the subjection of those who are perceived as objects and the objectification of those who are subjected. (Smart, 1985, p. 184).

Ways of Being with Children—The Pedagogical Atmosphere

In the strong stand we are taking on representational frameworks—discourses—it seems possible and necessary even to recover other meanings of education that resist the current technical ethos

that enframes education. Van Manen agrees with Foucault that power brings with its resistances in the form of other, local knowledges which for him appear in the classroom. He notes how ...in everyday teaching situations, the local knowledges that sustain pedagogical relations are not so much located at the margins but operate at the very center of classroom life. In the accounts of many teachers, the informal life of teaching usually overflows the technical rationalizations in terms of which education is commonly framed (Van Manen, 2003 quoted in Friesen, 2003, p. 140)

Van Manen's language (and the phenomenological effort as a whole), offers us different metaphors of teaching/meaning/practice that usurp the current pedagogical state of affairs. As a theoretical effort, the phenomenologists mine the richness of the Romantic tradition to invite the students back into the educational discourse. The phenomenologists struggle to represent the lives of students and teachers in a language that is closer to them, moving outside "burdened significations" (Bollnow, 2004, p.2/53), wherever possible.

For example, we might ask about the "pedagogical atmosphere" in the schools today. The atmosphere is "a profound part of our existence. By it we know the character of the world around us. Mood is a way of knowing and being in the world....for each specific object or quality, atmosphere or mood is the way human beings experience the world (Van Manen, 1986, in Friesen, 2003). Bollnow seriously engages Van Manen's work on pedagogical atmosphere, trying to unravel what it means to be with children in the classroom. With our apologies to the reader we cite his comment at length below:

A certain affective attitude of the caring adult therefore corresponds to a certain emotional state of the child, and both are required in equal measure if the bringing up of children for education to be successful or even possible. But it would be a mistake to regard both of these as distinct and separate, as if we could exchange one for the other. Both are different aspects of the same affective medium which encapsulates both the caring adult and the child, and within which the two sides are distinct only in a relative sense. This is what is signified by the concept of the pedagogical atmosphere. Here we are concerned with the total pedagogical situation and especially with the child's and the pedagogue's common overarching harmony and disharmony in their relationship to each other (Bollnow, 2004, p.2/53).

What pedagogic relations are possible at this time? The pedagogical atmosphere is thin and toxic as contemporary schools bristle with fear and malice (there is no space of trustworthiness to be found). Shades of the prison-house close upon our children with omnipresent surveillance cameras, security guards, concertina wire, drug-sniffing dogs, and disciplinary policies that express intolerance or distrust of children and the indeterminate physical and social spaces where they play. Within the current discourse of pedagogic production, our metaphors of schooling speak to re/making children in the image of society and disciplined adulthood. The pedagogical relationship which speaks to relations of care appears to be taken-for-granted or has simply disappeared in our conversations.

We must remind ourselves that the pedagogical relationship cannot take for granted. Our caring encounters with students must begin with an awareness of their presence (the here and now that abrades the future-oriented risk discourses, and challenges discourses of educational productivity). We must recognize, like the Romantics, the inner life of the child and recollect their belief that children were not made, but grow or develop naturally. (Rousseau was clear about this in his theory of childrearing.) Bollnow sums up this position neatly when he writes: “childrearing consists of a ‘letting grow’ that which unfolds after an inner, organic law meets an inner necessity” (Bollnow, 2004, 3/53). But he goes beyond the metaphors of pedagogy as growing and making, citing Pestalozzi’s *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children*, to argue that the foundation for child/student development and pedagogy is the natural bond that exists between mother and child. He is referring here to the relationships that surface in love and trust, thankfulness and obedience. Teachers must create an atmosphere of trust in the classroom—a place for them to dwell. Quoting Pestalozzi, Bollnow writes that the pedagogical relationship begins in the care expressed by the mother for her child: “The mother creates through her caring love for the child a space of trustworthiness, of dependability, or purity. What is found in this place seems to belong, to have sense, to be alive, trusted, close, and approachable” (Pestalozzi, 1927, quoted in Bollnow, 2004, p. 6/53).

Lingering or Pacing?

It is nine o’clock in the morning, and the teacher knows that they should be on page twelve. The principal is walking the halls, ensuring that everyone is keeping pace and “delivering the content”. There is no curricular room for children in our schools—no places of trustworthiness for them to dwell or linger, to feel or be at home. The current curricular technologies—social efficiency models have the effects of “enforcing progress”—“moving students through a certain number of curricular units per semester whether or not they felt the material had been covered adequately” and by utilizing a “lock-step curricula.” (deMarrais and leCompte, 1999, p.) In this factory model, teachers must of necessity, fetish running the course: “Pushing students through became a primary goal. Course offerings were judged by their cost per student. Skipping grades was promoted as a cost cutting measure. Pacing of child so that age/grade levels matched became prominent (LeCompte, p. 75).

Time and the bell, T.S. Eliot laments, have buried the day. Children have no time to linger because the flow of teaching is fragmented and interrupted by the time of the bell that breaks down the day into discrete 50 minutes periods, announcements, fire drills, visitors, phone calls. Children not longer are permitted to linger—to seriously enjoy the curricula, the pedagogical relations in class; instead, children

... are already preparing for an adulthood of quantified modular time, a time that is precise and continuous, replete with deadlines, appointments, punctual behavior, carefully timed routines, and calendar arrangements for the future. This kind of lifestyle is the price they will pay for the security

of their middle class bondage to the clockwork social order (Briod, 1978, quoted in Briod, 1986, p. 9).

The “open field of time” and “rhythmical lifeworlds” (Briod, 1986, p5, 7)), that characterize the very young are snatched from them. Instead is substituted an image of the present that draws meaning from a distant, undefined and worrisome future (worrisome because it is not and should be predictable according to tenets of risk discourse). Dewey believed that schools were life, not a preparation for life, but his progressive stance sounds foreign now. In our classrooms we usurp the time of children and rid them of their present/presence: “The future is a time of aggressiveness, a time when projects are envisioned, when one takes a stand in the face of what is to come” (Merleau Ponty, 1964, p. 112, quoted in Briod, 1986). The clock that sets the pedagogical pace is an instrument for reckoning their futures (Briod, 1986, p. 6).

And so we ask: What about the child’s desire to linger—their desire to “stop temporarily, and remain, as if reluctant to leave?” and “to be in a place?” as common definitions of the term suggest. Lingering occurs when there is the love of place. Sometimes that place is fictional: it can be the place or dwelling where the self is immersed in reading a text. Literacy can be an act of dwelling, a gathering of “being in” and “through” text; a encounter of self and world, in time and out of time (Wright,).

Books can become “secret places” where children re/create themselves in a world they’re reluctant to leave. We have forgotten that reading occurs “at the intersection of clock and inner time and that the essential requirement of clock time is existence, but the essential requirement of inner time is meaning and relevance. Within clock time, existence is basic” (Hunsberger, 1992, p. 67). Many students, given the chance, might enjoy the “stillness that gives reprieve” (Hunsberger, 1992, p. 76), found in a good book. As we become obsessed with running the course, we leave children—often those who most enjoy the text, behind. And, as we teach to the test, we destroy the integrity of the knowledge that comes from lingering, from the moment itself. We “cheat” the student out of the educational narrative that embraces as it unfolds, robbing them of their place and time. Giving them the end of the story, before they experience the journey themselves, rob them of the sense of completeness and wholeness that comes with lingering and as they linger, we leave them behind.

Wandering

The pedagogical atmosphere would be improved too, if there was room for children to wander. In this culture of assessment obsessed with running the course, few teachers dare to be “off course.” There is a sad irony too, about year-round schooling, where teachers describe themselves as being “on and off track.” The curricular prescriptions embedded in the culture of assessment contrast sharply with the child’s love of wandering—the movement of the body towards an indeterminate place (Langeveld, 1983, p.10). Just as there is no time for lingering, there is no room for wandering. This pedagogical metaphor entwines with the metaphor of educational lingering to suggest a pedagogical atmosphere that welcomes the child into the world—a world partially of their own

making through the movement of the body and mind through pedagogical spaces. In the classroom, there is little time for dallying and exploring the forest at the edges of the pathway on which we must all walk. In schools there are few spaces where the imagination can roam. The playground is a disenchanted, industrialized place that mirrors the standards movements with its emphasis on surveillance, predictability, order, discipline, intolerance and risk management that discourages wandering. Children are enclosed in unfertile paved and fenced yards, under the gaze of video cameras. This geography of control constitutes a spatial hidden curriculum that speaks loudly to children of adult distrust, disconfirmation and risk. Wandering as a pedagogical metaphor, can make claim to great... [p]edagogical significance, then it is given this meaning through deep, farreaching changes and rejuvenations of consciousness which the person experiences in wandering and which are similar in some ways to the experiences of festive celebrations (Bollnow, 1989, 49)

We have forgotten or dare not speak about the “joy of learning” at this time. The metaphor of wandering reminds us though that learning can be a festive occasion, where as Heidegger notes, deep pure moods of being arise (Bollnow, 1989).

Wonder?

The pedagogical atmosphere would be vastly improved if we were to make room for the child’s imagination. For the remainder of this article, we concern ourselves with the concept of the romantic pedagogic tradition. We are remembering what it is like to be with our children and make room for them to linger, wander, and wonder in the pedagogical discourse.

It is clear by now that we are proposing an essential dichotomy between the child’s aesthetically-minded exploratory play and the adult’s goal-oriented and measurement-driven productivity. We pursue these reflections with deference to Suzanne Langer’s (1967) treatise on the phenomenon of mind and particularly her characterization of mind as essentially a state of feeling—that the human mind is an emotional organ, subjectively responsive as it symbolically constructs an active language of coherence for itself in its sense-making reactions to its environment. Before we become too esoteric about it, we remind ourselves of Randall’s son whose emotionally-centered subjective actions are feeling states: glee in the movement of the stick which is a cane, a wand, a sword on his path, now a mystery forest for further wanderings where the night sky is speckled with firebirds. Perhaps with these thoughts in mind we can appreciate what Langer means when she says that that the symbols of children and artists “get lost in our psychological laboratories, where models from non-biological sciences and especially from intriguing machinery have taken the field, and permit us to analyze and understand many processes, yet lead us to lose sight of what phenomena we are trying to analyze and understand” (p. xix). We have here as this paper unfolds, then, the phenomenon of the child’s feeling states considered against the objectified printouts of his and her standardized test scores. Are we completely forgetting the mind’s essential state of being? Have we overlooked the primary dimensions and ontology of the human mind?

Langer (1967) is helpful to us; she probes the metaphysical issue of understanding our humanness as “the problem of conceiving mind as a natural phenomenon, a “natural wonder” and . the greatest of all such wonders in nature” (p. xxii). Further she writes that “[f]eeling, in the broad sense of whatever is felt in any way, as sensory stimulus or inward tension, pain, emotion, or intent, is the mark of mentality” (p. 4) For Langer, feeling is the starting-point of a philosophy of mind. This is an idea begun in *Feeling and Form* (Langer, 1953) and then more fully expounded in *Mind: An Essay in Human Feeling* (1967). For those of us concerned about a dehumanizing tendency in our empiricist models of standards and standardized testing, it is somehow soothing to revisit some core tenets of what it means to be human; certainly it helps to rethink current education practices in light of Langer’s validation of the primacy of feeling in a portrait of the mind. Yes, she looks most closely at the symbol patterns of artists in her quest for this understanding saying that the morphology of feeling can be derived from works of art, but it is the mind’s feeling states that are the ultimate focus of her work. The primordial images of the human mind in its cave drawings sculpt for us a recognition that “the emergence of feeling, animal mentality, human experience and mind” (1967, p. 74) lie at the core of our human individual consciousnesses. We express our feelings through the symbols of art and language, thereby becoming distinctly human individuals. And so to answer the rhetorical questions posed in the previous paragraph, our deep concern is that the current standards and standardized assessment movement is about as devoid of fundamental human feeling as the *Stepford Wives*’s dutiful ministrations! Our mania to standardize our curriculum, raise our test scores, and become fixated on static measures of knowledge may be sacrificing our students’ core human qualities of mind, their playful imaginative wanderings into the symbols of art, literature, music, dance, and drama.

And now: since it is a rhetorical journey in which we are engaged together here as readers and writers, we feel a roadmap of intent from here on in might help plot our co-constructive imaginations. We accept the risk of overt direction in offering it, knowing that the engaged reader will bring his or her own domains of interpretive realization to our script. We want to more fully plumb the significance of Suzanne Langer’s mind-essay on human feeling by bringing to her intellectual sphere many who also emphasize the fundamental elements of the mind’s playful wandering nature. Then, we’ll take a look at how the recent work in literacy education politics can also shed light on the damaging and inhuman elements of the standardized testing and standards-driven curricular scene. The laments of teachers in this landscape of voices is particularly plaintive; their experience of the current standardized-testing zeitgeist is almost uniformly disapproving, as they, like us, feel that children’s beings are being sacrificed on the slippery slope of enforced testing and teaching practices.

In *Releasing the Imagination*, Maxine Greene says, “I wish to connect my own seeking with the strivings of other teachers and teacher educators who are weary of being clerks or technocrats (1995, p. 2). With her arm around Hannah Arendt’s (1961) intellectual shoulder, this influential philosopher of education reminds us that at least one of our uniquely human impulses “depends on our existing

ability to make poetic use of our imagination, to bring into being the “as if” worlds created by writers, painters, sculptors, filmmakers . and to be in some manner a participant in artist’s worlds reaching far back and ahead in time (1995, p. 4). In companionship of ideas with Dewey (1916 & 1934), Schon (1983), and Bruner, (1986), Greene exhorts: “[o]nly when teachers can engage with learners as distinctive, questioning persons - persons in the process of defining themselves - can teachers develop what are called “authentic assessments” ” (1995, p. 13). We suppose that Suzanne Langer would agree with Greene who writes, again, that “the validation of any mode of inquiry ought to be found in its contribution to the life of meaning and to communication in the intersubjective world” (1995, p. 182). Our objections to the mania of standardized testing and dehumanizing acts associated with it are easily enough linked to those who so vehemently decried Enlightenment practices and politics. That is, those who were (and still are) troubled by the logical mechanisms of control and, as Foucault puts it, “technolog[ies] of power (1980, p.159) inspired by Enlightenment thinkers, most feared its “normalizing” effects (Foucault, 1980), its covert intents to bureaucratize and assign prescriptive filters through which all must pass. We think of Adorno (1972), Rorty (1979) and especially Freire and Macedo (1987), bringing to mind their insistence that the fully lived life is one governed not by edict of thought but by living responsibly in the world according to one’s individual subjective consciousness. The romantic pedagogic tradition, arising in response to Enlightenment rationality and master narratives - that suppose one story is the whole story - further inspires our doubt about the path of certainty that we associate with standardized curriculum and standardized assessments! Again, transitional questions: what are teachers saying about all this? Also, what are researchers and theorists saying about highly prescriptive literacy education policies these days?

We are wise to think about a comment made by Myers (1996) in his conscientious efforts to understand what the present standards and assessment-oriented practices mean for literacy education. He reminds us that various societal groups have differing views of what it means to be a literate, educated person. Also, his historical review of how forms and conceptions of literacy evolve out of social conditions and circumstances seems to belong with our notion that the present cookie-cutter template of standards and assessments misses out on all of the subjectively-lived realities of our students’ culturally and emotionally-based identities. He says, “[l]iteracy . is not an unchanging absolute and neither are intelligence, mind, schooling, teaching, learning, and testing. The mind is an adaptation of basic biological equipment to meet social needs, and schools, as institutions, translate a nation’s domin[ant] literacy policies into constructions of students and teachers...” (1996, p. 282). Researchers and theorists such as Allington (2002), Coles (2003), Garan (2002) and Taylor (1998) become indignant when they look at how the literacy politics arising out of our No Child Left Behind act and the National Reading Panel are, in fact, constructing students and teachers. Because of these two entities, two massive phenomena are in effect. First, is the dismissal of the past twenty-five years of constructivist research (Cambourne, 1988; Duffy & Jonassen, 1992; Fosnot, 1996; Holdaway, 1979; Krashen, 1999) validating the centrality of each child’s linguistic identity and

subjectively-lived responses to text in the acquisition of reading and literacy. Second, and directly linked to the first phenomenon, is the imposition of scripted templates of teaching and testing of mechanistic skills, shown to be a part of the develop of literacy and yet far removed from a central importance in that learning process. We have reached a point, perhaps especially in California, where teachers must steadfastly apply a step-by-step teaching and testing of skills not necessarily seen as central to reading and language acquisition AND devoid of almost any relationship to the lives and emotional vibrance of students' subjective-lived realities. The Stepford Wives are producing Stepford children. Ohanian (2001) describes the enforcers of standardized curriculum and testing as the Standardistos.

Let's now pay attention to the voices of literacy educators who, like us, are aghast at the deficit discourse of risk management, who also feel badly dehumanized by the laws of regularity so crudely blocked out by current literacy testing and teaching edicts. O'Hanian (2001) laments a new superintendent who "opts for reading-by-machines, a system that eliminates something called "teacher variability" " (p. 5). She is in league with theorists like Rosenblatt (1978), Bleich (1975) and Iser (1978) who spent their lives dignifying the act of reading when they described it, varyingly, as a mindful union of reader and text, governed by the life realities and, in fact, feelings of each individual reader. In *Big Brother and the National Reading Curriculum*, Allington (2002) tells us that "the scientific evidence we do have about teaching and learning to read is now being selectively reviewed, distorted, and misrepresented by the very agents and agencies who should give us reliable reports of what the research says" (p. 4). Like others, (Berliner & Biddle, 1996; Kibby, 1995), Allington is on solid ground when he tells us that reading achievement has risen slowly and steadily since the turn of the century. So, the inexorable push for standardized curricula and testing that has been so causatively linked to low literacy levels is based on a false—wholly incorrect—assumption of low reading and literacy levels. The National Assessment of Educational Progress data over the past thirty years shows us at least stable, if not slightly increasing, reading and literacy levels to the current date!

We are in the gripping throes of a quadruple whammy: (1) absolutely unsupportable assumptions that we are experiencing a literacy and reading crisis; (2) standardized reading, literacy, and content-area curricula and testing set up to fix the absent crisis; (3) oversight of all of the theory and research on reading and literacy that puts the active, feeling, subjective consciousness of each individual reader and thinker at the center of the story about what the teaching of literacy ought to consider and, perhaps most importantly for our purposes in this article, (4) a badly mistaken assumption that the Holy Grail of schooling is ever going to be found in accountability or standardization of anything anyway! We know that there is a big gap between reading achievements of rich and poor (Donahue, Voelkl, Campbell, & Mazzeo, 1999); that poverty has a terrible effect on reading and literacy levels which affect all aspects of schooling "measures" (Coles, 1998; Kozol, 1991; & Shannon, 1998); and that there is no one sure "quick fix" that can address how teachers ought to teach their students. We also believe Allington (2002) when he tells us that "when you are told what

to teach, how to teach, and when to teach, it is unlikely that you will see bad results as anything other than the responsibility of the system that mandated the instructional plan” (p. 35). But we ask, once you sort through all of the recent work that places doubt on the validity of phonics and scripted curricula as a wholly dependable route toward “good” reading (Coles, 2003; Garan, 2002) aren’t you left wondering if you haven’t been duped? Is it possible that all of the loud and misleading rhetoric about test scores and standards and standardized programs ignores the relatively sensitive and experienced teacher whose wisdom is left withering on the vine? Could it be also that the drone of voices about accountability and achievement completely overlooks the child’s need to be validated and nourished as a uniquely human being, despite the accounting on their “cume” cards? What are teachers saying about all this noise? Ohanian (2001) reminds us that “[s]chool does one thing very well: it convinces rotten readers that reading is supposed to be a nasty chore. Rotten readers (and too many of their teachers) have never heard of Louise Rosenblatt, so they don’t know about the power of “books read solely for entertainment” ” (p. 24). Listen now to a comment made by an experienced teacher as she responds to the current enforced teaching and testing practices in her school district for literacy education. The teacher is commenting on one of the many policies that have received national and state legislative funding which, in turn, is linked to very prescriptive teaching and testing: “[t]eaching at a Reading First school and a Reading first district is comparable to an assembly line at a factory. Every day, the students come to school, the teachers open up their heads, dispense an excessive amount of phonics and phonemic awareness into them, close their heads back up, and send them home” (CB, journal-response, 2004). This teacher is commenting on how her classroom practices have been affected by the legislation that has arisen from the National Reading Panel’s report about how to “fix” reading and literacy levels. CB’s final comment in her two-page response ends this way” “[o]ur students are not mechanical robots on an assembly line. With such a limited view from the National Reading Panel, this is exactly how the students and teachers feel” (CB, journal-response, 2004).

CB was one of 38 students enrolled in one of two sections of a graduate literacy course offered in the fall of 2004 and again in the spring of 2005. All of the students were reading texts (Coles, 2003; Allington, 2002; Bracey, 2004) & selected articles from Taylor (1998). The texts are unambiguously opposed to current prescriptive teaching and standardized testing practices visited upon teachers partially as a result of the report of the National Reading Panel. But, in their assigned one-page (or longer) journal responses to these texts, the thirty-eight graduate students were free to agree, disagree, or otherwise respond as they wished in synthesizing a personal response based on professional teaching experience. We have chosen this students’ response as a way of setting the tone for almost all responses obtained and as an accompaniment to Ohanian’s comment at the beginning of the paragraph. Ohanian was teaching in New York at the time her remarks were obtained. Let’s take a closer look at the profile of response made by the teachers, professional peers of CB, here in our Inland Empire in California as they read some of the professional work afoot in literacy politics at this time.

The Teachers' Voices

As mentioned, the teacher comments offered here are those of experienced, full-time teachers who are enrolled in a graduate program of reading and literacy. They read the texts referenced earlier, wrote one to two-page journal responses, and engaged in open-ended class discussion about how their current teaching of reading and literacy is affected by policies related to scripted material, a standardized literacy curriculum, and standardized testing—much of that influenced directly by the No Child Left Behind legislation earlier discussed. The thirty-eight teachers were assigned a set of criteria, presented through a rubric, which was to be used as a general guide to their one to two-page journal responses to the readings. We include the exact instructions presented to teachers to guide their written responses as a way of documenting our sense that the teachers were in no way “told” what to say or how to think about the content of the readings. Their subjectivity was invited and it was explained that their journal responses would become the basis for about 30 to 45 minutes of classroom discussion each week. Here are criteria offered to the graduate students for their journal responses:

Detailed & Analytic Reading

- mode of response indicates comprehensive attention to salient elements of articles;
- responses indicate varied attention to all elements of article;
- elements of article drawn together and responded to via synthetic commentary

Personal & Professional Response

- response framework indicates varied level of responses made (personal & professional commentary);
- key-phrases & vocabulary have been scrutinized;
- attention paid to research, theory & practical elements of article

Questions & Prompts Offered to Extend Audience Engagement

- definite points of response are emphasized and highlighted for audience;
- points for discussion are raised and are real and engaging;
- a sense of audience “extension” comes across

Next, we present a general analysis of the 38 teachers’ journal responses followed by selective excerpts; in total, two hundred and twenty eight, one-to-two-page journal responses were collected. In general, all but two teachers—two graduate students—were dismayed by enforcement of prescriptive teaching and standardization of their literacy curriculum. One teacher felt that the policies of standards and testing for reading and literacy education were a good thing for teachers and students alike. One other teacher was annoyed by what she felt was a too-vehement denouncement of prescriptive standards and related teaching practices. But, for all other 36 of the 38 teachers, it was as though someone had authorized them, through the research reviews and statistics of the texts read, to feel justified in their enormous frustration about the effect of literacy politics in their classroom. It was as though the presentation of the research finally had offered the teachers justification for their frustrations. Page after page of journal response came forth, a lament for a lost belief in teachers’ wisdom about good teaching practice for literacy education, and sadness for children who these teachers see as reduced to enforced expectations for test-score results. We use initials so as to preserve the anonymity of the teachers’ comments and from here simply enter the words of teachers now as a testament and support for everything we have written to this point in our text. The sentiments offered speak for themselves; each comment is from a different teacher and is exactly reprinted, a few grammatical flaws and all. By the way, the repeated use of the Stepford metaphor in our text and one of the teacher journals is completely serendipitous; much of this paper was written before we began closely analyzing the journals and then discovered anew that reference in the third comment below.

AV: I believe that the NRP’s [National Reading Panel’s] report is criminal in its intent to destroy and deform active minds into mindless, easily controlled individuals who are incapable of making decisions similar to characters in Ray Bradbury’s novel *Fahrenheit 451*.

MC: Our students will look, feel, and think about reading as a chore, as a must-do rather than something from which they can extract excitement, knowledge, meaning, joy and just plain fun. Whatever happened to the whole idea of reading for pleasure? I guess teacher opinion is not of value for those who have never been in the classroom . and have forgotten who our clients are.

MM: For decades publishers have been coming out with their “cure all program”, that supposedly will get every child reading. No matter what program is used, there will always be that small percentage of struggling readers. As teachers we know that it is impossible to teach and meet

everyone's needs. [sic] Unless, of course, you have classroom full of Stepford children who think and act in exactly the same way.

TL: Teachers are becoming trained monkeys. We are not allowed to think or apply our professional knowledge to improve our students' education. We must never deviate from the program because if we do, our students will fail to learn to read. Have we become a society where policy is based on the opinions of a few, with little regard for anyone that does not follow suit?

LN: The NRP has decided that basically teachers don't know what in the heck they are doing for reading instruction, therefore they must be given reading instruction materials that will make sure they are actually teaching reading, instead of something else, who knows what? I guess all of those years of schooling haven't been helpful to anyone and thank goodness there's a teacher's manual that will tell me and other teachers exactly what to do. I am forever in their debt.

HW: No matter what the score, my students have learned so much more than they could ever show on a multiple-choice test, and these tests can definitely not show how creative and insightful they often are. And that is the goal of American education—to produce curious, creative, thoughtful children.

Conclusion—Our Critical Voices

Our pedagogical line of defence against the standards movement may appear limited to more local concerns—to an examination of curricular practices in relation to those we teach. We do not however, lack the audacity to suggest that America has failed our schools—particularly the current administration which has plundered public coffers to build and dispense monies in its war chest against fictional weapons of mass destruction and often imaginary dangerous Others (such as the NEA).

The Standards Movement is but a shell game, anything to ward off yet another legitimization crisis by this administration by exercising hegemonic tactics that ensure a limited, one-dimensional definition of reality that supports big business cartels, the military apparatus, and the media which have been a fixture in American politics long before C. Wright Mills coined the phrase “military-industrial complex” in the 1960's. In this bid for the hegemonic restructuring of the American world-view, schooling in America still represents ambiguity and unpredictability in this disutopic, well-ordered world. Children are ambiguous others, only partially socialized and therefore suspect-hidden dangers. Schools are liminal locales for unsocialized, unpredictable youth on the way to becoming adults and desire for novelty and non-conformity is a threat to political stability. Teachers represent an ambivalent, educated middle class with political potential which is extinguished by the barrage of testing by universities.

The current culture of assessment plays handsomely into the administrative power and authority of school bureaucracies because it privileges management control and execution of tasks and erodes the epistemic authority, pedagogical common sense, and experience of teachers.

The media stereotypically perpetuates a moral panic about the inadequacies of educational system (where teachers are frequently an uncontrollable eroticized Other preying on innocent children). The media fail to point out that schools are inheriting the problems created by the streamlining of compensatory programs, health care, social security, job insecurity in a dual labor market, and the health issues in an increasingly racially and economically desegregated society. In the mean world portrayed by the media (the culture of fear perpetuated by the Bush administration, and the risk discourse of security agencies, police forces, social workers and others), the average citizen is looking for scapegoats. Schooling (which “comes out of their pocket”) is an easy target. These larger structural issues are played out locally, in the lives of our children; we have not time for them in the busy work of education.

In the cause of improving literacy and ensuring that our population has more access to the path toward an educated citizenry, we are engaging in dangerous practices. The seemingly innocent goal of creating access to a democratic society through literacy is blinding us to the fact that the means being used to attain it are dangerous. In trying to imprint all of our teachers and students with a one-size-fits-all template of teaching and standardized testing, we are obviating the multiplicity of language, culture, identity and basic human uniqueness of our many diverse citizens. We are, in fact, buying into risk management, itself a response to a moral, and political-economic crisis as a prescription for an absent literacy crisis. As if that weren't cause enough for worry, we feel that of all the issues raised here, the most serious is the erosion, or perhaps forgetfulness about what it is to be distinctly human and to be a child in the classroom. Teachers surely must seek to inspire imaginative connections between students and the worlds they encounter in books. And it is the teachers' work is to engage the subjectively-lived consciousnesses of their students with the dynamism of life, not a dull-minded itemization of the facts or sound patterns of a text. Isn't it?

It is with sadness, and with no disrespect intended, that we mourn the loss of the university as a critical public sphere, where academics could be transformative intellectuals. We think that there are a lot of reasons to worry about the effects of the standardized-testing and standardized curriculum phase we live in right now. We urge leaders in faculties of education across the state and the nation to at the very least express caution about state edicts for teaching and testing practices. We would feel reassured to hear statements that set forth serious reservation about how standardization affects the lives of teachers and students. We have heard teachers talk about their reactions to some of these totalitarian enforcements; we might want to stop and rethink our current tendencies toward scripted curriculum. Lest as writers we also forget, we remind ourselves that children exploring their world landscapes—“texts” of experience ultimately—are not inherently responsive to the stopwatch and standardized timetables with which we might be trying to dangerously imprint them. This is the time to ask questions about the pedagogical atmosphere, the imaginative lingering, wanderings, and wonder of our children. Perhaps it is time to make room for our children by re-collecting our thoughts, and setting a different course and pace on the road less traveled.

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